



News

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SBA Names Montana's Main Street Business of the Year

HELENA, MT – SBA Montana District Director Michelle Johnston announced today that Innovative Marketing Solutions, LLC of Hathaway, MT has been named SBA's 2004 Montana Main Street Business of the Year. IMS will be honored along with an outstanding cast of entrepreneurs and advocates at SBA's Annual Small Business Week Awards Luncheon at Missoula's Doubletree Inn on May 7th.

Innovative Marketing Solutions, LLC (IMS) is the brainchild of Mandi Luce-Heinle of Hathaway, MT. Heinle is President of the Distribution Division of IMS and is a graduate of Montana State University Northern in Havre. Heinle became interested in selling Montana food products when her family ranch became part owners in a boxed beef company, Big Sky Beef. She was the wholesale sales manager for Big Sky Beef and during that time she developed a strong network of grocery and restaurant contacts throughout Montana who were interested in carrying products manufactured in the state. So, it was only natural that when Heinle was bought out by Big Sky Beef, she would launch a business to assist Montana companies with developing marketing plans and making contacts within the grocery and restaurant industries.

Shortly after forming IMS, Heinle recognized a demand for a small distribution company that would work with Montana companies to take products to market and to ensure consistent service of grocery locations. Throughout her first three years with IMS, Heinle developed strong relationships with stores and food manufacturers across the state, and as a result, sales more than tripled.

In April 2003, Heinle recognized that future growth and development of IMS could not be constrained by her own personal time and management resources. Therefore, she identified the need to add additional management to the company and offered a partnership in IMS to Sarah Hamlen.

Montana native Sarah Hamlen is President of the IMS Sales Management Division. She graduated from the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, MN with a degree in Business Marketing and Management. She kicked off her career with Cargill, Inc. and returned to Montana in 2000, as the Senior Marketing Officer for the Montana Department of Agriculture. In this position she became known to many Montana food processing companies, which is how she met Heinle. She later worked for Ripple Marketing in Bozeman, specializing in business planning and feasibility studies for small businesses. Her experience has helped her to assist Montana food manufacturers in identifying their promotions budgets, scheduling appropriate promotions with grocery stores, and work with Heinle to manage the growth and expansion of IMS.

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Main Street Business of the Year

IMS currently distributes products for 39 value-added food manufacturers in more than 100 grocery, convenience, and super stores in the state. In addition to expanding distribution services, IMS has taken on the addition of a Wheat Montana bread distribution route in the Flathead and Helena, expansion of the sales management division, and is actively developing and marketing the company website, BuyMT.com.

David Anderson of the Colstrip Small Business Development Center nominated Innovative Marketing Solutions. Other award winners being honored include: William Woody of Nightingale Nursing Services, Inc. of Missoula – Montana Small Business Person of the Year; Jack Morgenstern of Century Companies, Inc. of Lewistown – First Runner-up Small Business Person of the Year; Jennifer Keck of Big Sky Travel Nurses, Inc. in Conrad – Woman owned Business of the Year; Frederick “Rick” Larson of Employee Benefit management Services, Inc. – Entrepreneurial Success Award; Ryan Deskins of R&R Pressure Washing of East Helena – SBA Young Entrepreneur of the Year; Kim Wild of TowHaul Corporation, dba Smith Equipment USA of Belgrade – National Small Business Exporter of the Year; Jerry Sullivan of Flint Creek Valley Bank in Philipsburg – Financial Services Advocate of the Year; Sheryle Shandy of Billings Food Bank & Montana Harvest Kitchens/Montana Harvest Gift Boutique in Billings – Home-Based Business Advocate of the Year; Flathead Business Journal of Kalispell – Small Business Journalist of the Year; Craig Smith of the Fort Peck Community College in Poplar – Minority Small Business Advocate of the Year; Joe Fletcher of the Great Falls Job Service Workforce Center – Veteran Small Business Advocate of the Year; and Joy Ott of Wells Fargo Bank Montana, N.A. in Billings – Women in Business Advocate of the Year.

For more information on SBA programs and services, contact the Montana SBA District office at (406) 441-1081 or log onto www.sba.gov/mt.

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